

## THE BITTERNESS OF THE CROSS

### NO. 2683

A SERMON  
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*"They...shall be in bitterness for him."  
Zechariah 12:10*

YOU know, dear friends, that this text primarily refers to the Jewish nation. They will not always be blinded, as they are at present. The veil will ultimately be taken away from their eyes and their heart, and when it is taken away, it will not be by the enlightenment of mere reason, or through the cogency of argument by itself, but it will be through the outpouring of the Spirit of our God. The verse from which our text is taken makes this quite clear, "I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications."

Our Lord Jesus Christ can only be seen in His own light. The grace of God must be given to us before we can see and understand Christ at all, and this shall be the great proof that grace has been given to Israel—that they shall look upon Christ. It is good evidence that grace has been given to any man when he looks upon Christ, obeying the great command, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." This is the first sign and token of believers, and it is to be our continual distinguishing mark, for we are always to be "looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith."

There is much more in a look at Christ than many suppose, it is the index of everything that appertains to the Christian life. There must be life in an eye that can see, and when there is life in the eye, there is life in the whole man who possesses that eye. When an eye can see Christ, it can see other things that He intends it to see. That eye which has been enabled to behold Him, and which has taught the heart to cry, "My Lord and my God," is prepared to see all the wondrous things that are in God's law.

The first mark of grace then in the Jew, will be that he shall look to Christ. By that word "look," I do not understand a mere transient glance at Him, but a long, lingering, wistful, discerning, penetrating, loving look at Him, and unto Him, as it is in that verse, "They looked unto him, and were lightened." At first, it may be only a furtive stolen glance, but when men come to see and feel the full power of Christ, they will want to have a long, fixed, steady gaze at Him. Blessed will be the day when the Jews shall be brought even to think seriously about Christ.

At present, they will scarcely listen to the arguments concerning Him, they denounce the Nazarene, and close their ears against His Gospel, but the day shall come when they will hear, when they will listen diligently, and incline their ear, and come unto Him that their soul may live. They shall look, and look, and look, and look, and look, until the vision shall at last break in upon their very soul, and then they shall say, "It is He! Yes, it is He of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write. This is no other than the promised Messiah, the Son of David, and alas! hitherto, both we and our fathers have rejected Him." And as they thus look, and realize the greatness of their guilt, they will begin to weep and lament that they have so long refused their only Savior.

So, the first effect upon the Jews of a true sight of Christ—and as we are all constituted so much alike, the first effect upon any man who has a true sight of Christ—is that it produces sincere sorrow, "They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn."

I must confess that I have no love for a dry eyed faith. The faith that never wept over sin will have to be wept over one of these days. If you say that you have seen Christ, and yet you have never bemoaned yourself, and mourned over your transgressions, I think you must have seen a false christ, and not the true Son of God, for they who behold His wounds are themselves wounded, they who gaze upon His pierced heart are themselves pierced to the heart—nay, they are pierced in the heart, and they who by faith, see the flowing of His precious blood feel their very hearts bleed on account of Him, and all that He endured on their behalf. A sight of His crucifixion crucifies sin. A sight of His death—if it be a true sight—is the death of all love of sin.

If then, you have never felt the mournful effect of the sorrowful spectacle of the bleeding Savior, you have need still to stand, and to look, and look, and look again until you do feel it, for so it will always be, “They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn.”

That is the general thought of this verse, the Jews will look to Christ, and they will mourn, and the same thing happens with Gentiles, they also look to Christ, and mourn. So the theme we are to consider is the wonderful truth that when we rightly look to Christ, whether we are Jews or Gentiles, we are “in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.”

It is quite true that of all sights in the world, the sight of Christ crucified is the sweetest. People say, “See Naples and die,” but it would be worthwhile to see Christ by faith, even if that sight were necessarily followed by death. Of all that can be seen in the world, there is nothing as delightful as a believing sight of Jesus Christ. I appeal to all of you whose eyes have ever been ravished with that wondrous vision, do you not say to your Lord—

*“A glimpse—a single glimpse of Thee,  
Would more delight my soul  
Than this vain world, with all its joys,  
Could I possess the whole”?*

At first sight, it seems strange that the mourner turns his eyes sooner to the place called Calvary than to the sacred spot where the star of Bethlehem shone, and stranger still that there should be more delight to be found in Gabbatha and Golgotha than even in the Mount of Transfiguration. The cross of Christ is the first resort of sorrow for sin, and it is the last abode of holy grief, where she lays aside her weeds, and puts on her beautiful array.

Yet there must be some bitterness always associated with Calvary, do not be startled at that thought. The command concerning the paschal lamb was, “With bitter herbs shall ye eat it,” so marvel not that the Lamb of God, however sweet He is, and however nourishing to our souls, can never be enjoyed by us without the bitter herbs of godly sorrow for sin, “They shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him,” and that bitterness shall be of the most intense kind, “as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.”

Our line of thought will be this. First, I want to point out to you that *our first sight of Christ brings bitterness*, then secondly, I will try to show you that *our continued sight of Christ works in us throughout life a measure of the same bitterness*, and thirdly, I will ask you to notice that *this bitterness has most gracious effects upon us*.

**I.** First then, I want to point out to you that OUR FIRST SIGHT OF CHRIST BRINGS BITTERNESS INTO OUR SOUL.

When a man, for the first time, by faith sees Christ upon the cross, and understands the meaning of His great substitutionary sacrifice, *he is bitterly grieved because he has not known Him before*. Imagine the case of a Jew who has, perhaps, lived in a nominally Christian country for fifty years. He has frequently heard the name of Jesus mentioned in various ways, but he has always received it with indignation, possibly even with ridicule. It is quite likely that he has spoken very bitter things against the Nazarene, repeating the old stories current among his race concerning the Prophet of Nazareth, and all

the while thinking that he was doing service to JEHOVAH by rejecting one whom he supposed to be a pretender.

Imagine that man, all of a sudden, convinced that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the Son of God, the only Savior of sinners, the promised hope of Israel's seed. Why, I think, if there were not many sweet and precious thoughts to be mingled with the bitter ones, he would be almost driven to utter despair. Surely he would, with humble penitence and many tears, fall down at that dear Savior's feet, and cry, "Forgive me, Lord, every opprobrious epithet that I have ever uttered, pardon me for every scornful word that I have spoken, forget every hard and cruel speech that I have made against Thee, O Thou bleeding Lamb of God, whose blood taketh away the sin of the world!"

I beseech some of you who are not Jews but sinners of the Gentiles, to recollect that your position is no better than theirs, and in some respects it is even worse. I know mine was, because I knew Jesus to be the Messiah. I never had a doubt about that, and yet I did not believe in Him. I acknowledged Him to be the Son of God. From my childhood I was taught that great truth, and I accepted it as a fact, yet I did not obey Him as my Lord and my God.

I knew Him to be the only Savior of sinners, and if anyone had spoken contrary to that truth in my presence, my indignation would have burned against him, yet all the while, so far as my own consciousness was concerned, He was no Savior to me. I knew that He hung upon the cross that He might save the guilty, but I did not, for a long time, realize that I had a personal interest in His saving grace.

From my own experience, I am sure that the bitterness of anyone who has sinned in that way, when at last he understands the great plan of salvation, and finds that Christ loved him, and gave himself to death for him, must be quite as great as the bitterness of the Jews who make the same discovery. For, lo, my brethren, they did it ignorantly in unbelief, but you and I have done it wantonly, or at least carelessly, and indifferently, knowing that we were rejecting our mother's Savior and our father's Christ.

Herein is much of bitterness that you ought to feel, and when you do get a true view of Jesus as your Substitute and Savior, you will feel it very acutely, and you will say to yourself, "Oh, that I had known Him before! Oh, that I had loved Him before! Oh, that I had trusted Him before! Alas! that all these years should have been wasted and that I should have chosen sin rather than the Savior, and the pleasures of the world sooner than the delights of His dear love." I know that you will have bitterness about that matter when you really come to Christ for salvation.

Next, there will come over your soul, when you get a true sight of Christ, much bitterness *on account of your having slighted the extraordinary love of Christ to you*. This truth will come home to your heart with amazing power, "He loved me, and gave Himself for me. For me He wore that crown of thorns, for me He endured that terrible scourging, for me He bore the piercing of those nails, for me He agonized unto that bloody sweat, for me He suffered even unto death."

And then you will say, "And yet I have been all this while slighting Him! Others have loved me, and I have returned their love, ashamed to be thought ungrateful, but all of them put together have never loved me as He has done, yet I have been His enemy, and as far as I could, I have opposed Him. He has stood outside my door, and knocked, and I have kept Him waiting there till His head has been filled with dew, and His locks with the drops of the night. Woe is me! Woe is me that I should have treated so ill my best Friend!"

It is long, dear brothers and sisters, since my heart ceased to shut Him out. I admitted Him long ago, but even while I am talking to you about it, I feel all the old bitterness of that sad past coming over me. I could stand here and weep to think, that though I loved Him comparatively early in life, I did not love Him earlier, and did not sooner yield to His persistent knocking, and to the gracious pressure of His infinite love.

Another bitterness, which ought soon to be banished, steals over the heart, it is this, *the fear lest Christ should not be ours after all*. I have known some, who have understood the doctrine of the cross

right well, and have believed in the great love of Jesus Christ for sinners, but then there has come over their mind and heart that dark doubting thought, “Will His blood be available for us? Will He ever be ours? After years of rejecting Him, shall we ever find Him, or have we forever missed Him? Is our day of grace past, or does He still wait to be gracious? Will He still accept us, or has He gone away saying, ‘I will give them up, they are joined unto idols, so I will let them alone’?”

Oh, the bitterness of such a question as that! To see living water, clear as crystal, leaping up close by you, and yet to fear that you may not drink of it! To see the bread of life placed upon the table, and yet to doubt whether your unworthy lips may ever taste of that heavenly food! That is bitterness indeed, but let it be a bitterness that goes away at once and forever, for there is no question about that matter.

If you will believe in Jesus, that is proof positive that God wills it. The question is never about God’s will, when once your will is surrendered to Christ. If you are willing to accept Christ, it is because it is the day of God’s power, and He has made you willing. If you will have Christ, He presents Himself to you with this gracious word, “Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” So let that bitter thought be nailed up to the cross, and die forever.

Then there follows, over and above all this, the black, bitter thought, that *our sin caused His death on the tree*. The awakened soul sighs, “My sins! My sins! My sins!” Nothing ever reveals sin like the cross of Christ. Milton pictures Ithuriel with his spear touching the toad that lay squatting at Eve’s ear, and suddenly it arose in the form of the dark fiend of hell. So does the cross touch what we thought to be only mistakes and errors, and they rise before us in their true character as hellish sins.

In the light of Calvary, sin does like itself appear, and what is the likeness of sin there? Why, the murderer of the Son of God—the murderer of the Prince of Life—the murderer of man’s best Friend, whose only crime was this—“found guilty of excess of love,” and therefore He must die. O sin, is this what you are? Are you a God-killing thing? I have heard of men being guilty of regicide, but what shall I say concerning Deicide?

Yet sin virtually, and as much as it can, stabs at the Godhead, crying, with the wicked husbandmen, “This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours.” This is the terrible character of sin—it will imbrue its hands in the blood of Him who is perfectly innocent and perfectly benevolent, it will take man’s best Friend by the throat, condemn Him as if He were a felon, nail Him to a gibbet, and then stand and gaze at Him, and mock His very death-throes.

There is nothing upon earth that is as devilish as sin. Oh, to what extremes of atrocity has sin not gone! And such is your sin and mine, to a greater or lesser degree. A sight of the cross, therefore, brings bitterness into the soul, because it shows us what sin is, and what are its ultimate issues and true designs if it could carry them out. Never do we smite upon our breast as hard as when we see the cross of Jesus. We are condemned at the mercy seat even more fully than we are at the judgment seat. This is the condemnation of sin in the soul of man, that he sees what it did in murdering the Christ of God, and this causes the repenting sinner to “be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.”

To this is added another source of bitterness, namely, *the discovery of the wrath of God on account of sin*. You stand in imagination, and look at Jesus Christ dying upon the cross, and you say to yourself, “The Romans are here, and the Jews are here, and all men are here, representatively, but there is Someone greater than all these here.” Then there comes to you from the ancient prophecy this message, “It pleased the LORD to bruise him; he has put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand.”

Yes, God Himself put Christ into the sinner’s place through wondrous love to us, and as Christ stood in the sinner’s place, though a sinner He could never be, God treated Him as if He were actually the sinner. See how the Father’s wrath burns against human sin, He could not be angry with His well-beloved Son, but inasmuch as Christ stood in the sinner’s place, God poured out the vials of His wrath upon Him just as if He had been guilty.

Behold how the Father smites Him, these are His words, “Awake, O sword.” Will not the rod suffice, great God? No. “Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, says the Lord of hosts. Smite the shepherd.” But will not some common smiting be sufficient? No, to the very heart He must be smitten, and Jesus must die the death of the cross that we may live forever.

“How God must hate sin then, and what wrath must fall upon me!” That is the convicted sinner’s thought. “My sin is personal and actual, and not, like Christ’s, imputed, and since it is my own, how can God continue to bear with me?” And the dark suggestion comes into the soul, “He will not bear with you much longer, for it is written, ‘I will ease me of mine adversaries.’” Yes, verily, a true sight of the cross makes us full of bitterness on account of the awful guilt of sin, and the divine wrath which it provokes.

And then comes the bitterness of *the dread of never being forgiven*. The convinced sinner says, “God spared not His only begotten Son when sin was laid upon Him, then surely, He will not spare me. I am full of guilt, and I have within me a fountain of evil which is perpetually bubbling up with foulness—how can the pure and holy God spare me? Where can I flee to get away from His presence? How can I escape from the bolts of His righteous wrath? Let me fly whither I may, He will pursue me, and overtake me and destroy me.”

Do any of you know what it is to feel like this? I remember when I did, I was in such terror that I feared lest every step I took should be my last, and that I should stumble first into my grave and then into hell. “Did the cross make you feel like that?” you ask. Yes, certainly, for I could not but think that, though Jesus cried, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” I should never have to ask that question, because I should know why God had forsaken me, for my sin was sufficient to drive Him away from me forever.

I feel quite sure that God intends our first sight of Christ to fill our soul with bitterness, and therefore I ask you most seriously to question your conversion unless there was some measure of this bitterness mingled with it. A sinner’s sight of Christ must breed sorrow for sin, it is unavoidable, and the more clear that sight shall become, and the more it is mixed with faith, and the more sure we are of pardon, the more bitterness will there be in it. When we know that our sins are forgiven, it is then that we most of all realize their guilt, and abhor and hate them. That hymn which we sometimes sing exactly sets forth this truth,—

*“My sins, my sins, my Savior,  
How sad on Thee they fall!  
Seen through Thy gentle patience,  
I tenfold feel them all.*

*I know they are forgiven,  
But still their pain to me  
Is all the grief and anguish  
They laid, my Lord, on Thee.*

*My sins, my sins, my Savior!  
Their guilt I never knew  
Till, with Thee, in the desert  
I near Thy passion drew;*

*Till with Thee in the garden  
I heard Thy pleading prayer,  
And saw the sweat drops bloody  
That told Thy sorrow there.”*

**II.** Now secondly, OUR CONTINUED SIGHT OF CHRIST WORKS IN US THROUGHOUT LIFE A MEASURE OF THE SAME BITTERNESS.

For first, *as the great love of Christ is better known, it brings deeper grief for sin.* We then more deeply lament that we should ever have slighted such love, and that such love should ever have been called to so vast a sacrifice as that which it made for us. I do not suppose, beloved, that your knowledge of the love of Christ at first was at all comparable to what it is now, if you have studied in the school of Christ's love, and have believed it to be the most excellent of all the sciences, you will by the teaching of the Spirit and by experience, attain a clearer knowledge of the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, and side by side with that will be a growing sense of abhorrence of yourself, and detestation of the sin which nailed your Savior to the tree. It must be so, deeper love to Christ will breed greater grief and a yet more bitter bitterness on account of sin.

There will also be, in your heart, an intenser bitterness arising from *the dread of grieving your Lord.* Oh, have you not sometimes wished that you could die rather than run any risk of apostasy? I marvel not at the poor Methodist who, when surrounded by blasphemers, who seemed as if they would drive him from Christ, fell on his knees and prayed the Lord to take him home to heaven, so that he might never again be tempted to go astray. Bitterer than death itself would it be for us to ever dishonor that dear name by which we are called.

Feel you not so, my brother, my sister? I believe that the higher your joy in Christ, the greater will be your fear lest you should bring disgrace upon Him. You stand almost on the top of the mountain of communion, you seem to be transfigured with your Master, and to be glowing with the light that streams from Him, yet even there the thought comes to you, "What if, after all this, I should slip with my feet?"

Peter, who was one of the three with the Lord on the holy mount, himself afterwards denied his Master with oaths and curses, then may not I also be found wanting in the time of trial?" This self-examination is almost necessary to the mellowing of our holy joy. As the sycamore fig never ripens till it is bruised, so there is a high joy of fellowship that needs bruising, by a sense of our own weakness, ere its essential sweetness shall be fully developed. I have a great fear concerning your condition if you never felt anything of this bitterness—this dread lest, in thought, or word, or deed, by omission or by commission, you should grieve the sweet and tender love of Christ.

You know how the spouse said, "I charge you, ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field"—by all that is most gentle, and timid, and delicate, and jealous, and full of love—"that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please." It is thus that the holy soul feels the bitterness of an inward jealousy lest she should be treacherous to her Lord, or that anything should occur to grieve Him.

The next bitterness is caused by *a deeper regret on account of our own unworthiness.* I think that those who love Christ much, and who have had a clear view of His love, can never be satisfied with themselves. Do you ever rise from your knees and say, "I am quite content with that prayer"? If so, I fancy that you cannot have prayed "with groanings which cannot be uttered." Did you ever preach a sermon, brother, and feel, after it was finished, that you could run up the top-gallants and cry, "Never man preached as I have done"? If so, I am afraid that it was very poor preaching, with many fine feathers in its tail to spread out like a peacock's, but with few feathers in its wings to make it mount up like an eagle.

It will never do for us to be satisfied with ourselves, for vehement love thinks nothing good enough for Christ. When it reaches its best, it says, "My best is utter poverty compared with his deserts." "Oh!" says the saint who truly loves his Lord, "I am ashamed to bring Him even my best offerings, and when sometimes, I lie at His feet, and feel that I am perfectly consecrated, I still wish that there was something better to consecrate, and that I could keep up that complete consecration at all times and seasons, and under all circumstances."

But since it is not so, with any one of us, there is a bitterness that mingles with the very sight of Christ. You may look at yourself until you get quite pleased with yourself, but you cannot remain so when once you look at Him. You know how Job spoke to the Lord, when he took his right position before Him, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I

abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” Those brethren who think themselves perfect had better come and look at their Lord, and then, if their comeliness is not turned to corruption, I shall be greatly mistaken. A glimpse at Him would act like flames of fire turning dry stubble into ashes, for in a moment, all their glory would be utterly consumed.

Then again, I am sure there is another bitterness that will always accompany a true sight of Christ, and that is *an intense horror at man’s rejection of Him*. Have not you, beloved, sometimes looked at your Lord, and loved and adored Him, till first, you have pitied men, and afterwards you have pitied Christ? With those who love Christ most, there comes to be after a time, sympathy with Jesus rather than with men. I can understand how, even when the enemies of God shall be destroyed at the last and the smoke of their torment shall rise up forever and ever, the perfect ones in heaven will sing, “Hallelujah.”

Certain persons who are on earth at the present time, if they had been at the Red Sea, and seen old Pharaoh’s army cast into the depths, would have mournfully said, “This is very, very grievous to us.” But as for me, if I had been there, I would have joined with Moses and with Miriam and said, “Sing ye to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.” I confess that I have very small sympathy with Pharaoh, but I have the most intense sympathy with JEHOVAH and with His people, and I question whether the wonderful sympathy with lost sinners, which some people profess to feel, is not sympathy with their sin as much as with themselves, perhaps unconsciously to those who indulge it.

If we were perfectly holy, we should desire to do just what God does, and we should wish God to do exactly what He is doing, and we should rejoice without question in all the will of God. One result of such a state of mind as that would be that we should cry with the psalmist, “Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake thy law.”

I do not know that I ever felt a greater horror in my soul than when, in Rome, I stood at the foot of the Santa Scala—“the holy staircase,” as they call it—on which they pretend to show the marks where our Savior fainted on the stairs in Jerusalem. I saw poor deluded creatures go up and down those stairs upon their knees, repeating certain forms of prayer all the while. Ah, me! it did seem horrible, and worst of all, the priests have turned the Christ Himself into an idol. There is a little black picture of Him at the top of the stairs, which is reputed to have been painted by Luke, and it is kissed and worshipped, and thus even our blessed Master is made to act the lackey to idolatry.

I thought that if I could have borrowed a thunderbolt or two for a little while, I could have made a clean sweep here and there in Rome, but the time for that is not yet. That time will come, and a very clean sweep there will be when the cry is heard, “Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen....And her smoke rose up for ever and ever.”

But brethren, there is an intense bitterness in your heart when you come truly to see Christ on the cross, as you realize that all people do not believe in Him, that His kingdom has not yet come, and that His will is not done on earth as it is in heaven. Still do men reject Him, they scoff at His Gospel, they despise His cause, they set up idol gods and false saviors, and all this is as a dish of bitter herbs to those who really love Him. It seems passing strange that He should ever have entered into this awful battle between good and evil, that He should have come, the foremost and noblest of champions, baring His arm for the war, and that in the fight He should not only have sweat as it were great drops of blood, but that He should have had His heart broken in the fray.

Ah, me! how sad it is that He, whom angels worship, and in whom God Himself delights, should be trampled, by the feet of wicked men like mire in the streets, that they should dare to defile with their spit that face which outshines the sun, and pour contempt and scorn upon Him who fills eternity with the splendors of the deity! All this is like bitter herbs to those who love Him.

Still, the final victory will be won by Him, and it will be worth all that it costs. Up the everlasting hills He has already ascended, victor from the fight, and today He divides the spoil with the strong. But oh, that it had been possible for that bitter cup to have passed from Him! Oh, that it had been possible that He should not drink the hell-draught! Yet He did drink it to the last dregs, it is all over now, glory



be to His holy name! But the taste of the bitter herbs is always present with the true Paschal Lamb to those who spiritually feed thereon by faith.

**III.** Now I must close by noticing that THIS BITTERNESS HAS MOST GRACIOUS EFFECTS UPON US.

First, it must be evident to you all that *this bitterness works great hatred of sin*. We see how cruel sin has been to Christ, and we therefore seek to avoid it. The burnt child dreads the fire, but we are not quite in that condition. We dread the fire of sin because it burned the Savior, that is why we hate it so intensely. Sin murdered Him, so can we ever tolerate it? Could anyone ever play with the knife that had killed his best friend? Could he preserve it as a choice treasure? Nay, he would, if he could, fling it into the depths of oblivion, and sin, you cruel murderous thing that slew our Savior, we would take revenge upon you! We abhor you, God has made you bitter to us, and there dwells in that bitterness, a power that helps to sanctify us.

But next, *that bitterness makes Christ very sweet*. “Why!” you ask, “how is that?” Well, I suppose that the bitter herbs made the paschal lamb taste all the sweeter to the Israelite of old, and I am sure that a bitter sense of sin, and bitter regrets that we should ever have cost our Savior so much, and a bitter sense of our own unworthiness, all make Christ more precious to us. It is like the two balances in a pair of scales, when you go up, Christ goes down, and when you go down, down, down, down, to nothing, and far below zero, then Christ goes up. No man can know the sweetness of Christ who has not tasted the bitterness of sin.

Next, *it makes all worldly things lose their taste*. If you get some of the bitterness that comes of mourning about Christ, the sweetest things of the world will have but very little attraction for you. I will give you an illustration of this truth. Suppose you had an only son, and that you lost him, would not everything look dark about you then? It comes home to a man’s heart very heavily when such a treasure is taken away from him. He has a farm, but he has no joy in it, the old home seems to be a very dreary place to him now, he wishes to move away from it, and to forget all it contained.

That is the kind of bitterness of which our text speaks, “They shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.” And thus the world loses its charms for true believers, as Paul says, “It remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not,” because a stronger flavor has taken possession of their palate, and made them forget everything else. Thus, the bitterness of mourning for Christ takes away the power to enjoy the sweets of this world.

But there is something better than that, for *it removes the bitterness from the things of this life*. Suppose you suffer great pain. I was yesterday by the side of a dear sister in Christ who has undergone terrible pain, and she said to me, “Thoughts of the Lord Jesus, and of His sufferings, were so sweet to me that I seemed only to recollect my own griefs as they helped me to remember His.” That is how it should be with each of us, as we are called to suffer, we should say—

*“His way was much rougher and darker than mine;  
Did Christ, my Lord, suffer, and shall I repine?”*

How often the bitterness of poverty has vanished when men have thought of Him who had not where to lay His head! How frequently the bitterness of persecution has departed when His followers have remembered that He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief! One brings us what he says is a bitter draught, and we say, “Do you call that bitter? I have tasted something much more bitter than that, I can drink it, and even rejoice in it, since I have been taught how to take the very gall of bitterness, that which has the intensity of the bitterest Peruvian bark, even sympathy with my Savior in His awful sufferings.”



And let me also tell you, dear brethren, that one effect of this bitterness upon the soul that feels it is, *to take away all bitterness against your fellow men*. If you have really felt the bitterness of your sin against Christ, you have said to yourself, “Well, now, after this, I must be sweet, and gentle, and kind, and tender, and forgiving towards others. Somebody has offended me. Ah, but then how much I offended God! He will not ask my forgiveness, he says. Yes, but my Lord prayed for those who put Him to death and said, ‘Father, forgive them,’ though they sought not forgiveness, must not I do the same?”

I am sure that, if you mourn on account of your own sin, you will be the last person in the world to be harsh and severe in your judgment upon others. You will say, “I cannot take up the stone to cast at them, even if others do so.” The poor harlot comes before the Savior, and the self-righteous Pharisees will accuse her, but no one of us, I think, will do so, for who among us has not been guilty, and if we have been pardoned, how can we condemn others?

I charge any of you, who harbor ill-will against others, to remember that you cannot be Christians if you carry that foul serpent in your bosom. You can bring no acceptable sacrifices to God’s altar while you are at enmity against your brother. “He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?” Whatever else you may or may not do, this you must do, forgive as you would be forgiven, and let the bitterness of your sympathy with Christ take away from your nature all bitterness, and harshness, and unkindness, and malice, towards your fellow men.

Last of all, *in this bitterness with Christ, there is an unutterable sweetness*. If I were asked when I have felt most happy, if the question were put to me in the most unlimited sense—“When did you feel such happiness as you could wish always to feel?”—I should not quote any of the days of earth’s mirth, for as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the best of mortal merriment. I could not even quote the day in which I first knew the Lord, because though there was an intensity of delight about it, it was not as deep as the joy I am going to mention. Neither, if I had to ask for a joy that might continue with me, should I ask to have the high delights which I have often experienced when in sweetest fellowship with my Lord, for that kind of joy is killing, we cannot endure much of it.

But I think that the sweetest joy I ever felt was when, racked with pain, and broken all asunder, I fell back upon the omnipotent love of God, like a child who cannot walk, or move, or even stand, but just lies on its mother’s breast, quite passive, quite at peace.

I think that mourning for sin is as sweet a flower as blooms outside heaven. I suppose that pearl of flowers blooms not on the other side of Jordan. It is the only flower on earth that I would like to carry there, just as Rowland Hill used to say that repentance and he had kept such sweet company that the only regret he had about heaven was that he supposed he should not repent there.

Well, all that is good we shall have there, “and there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defiles.” But I do assure you, from my own experience, that the still, calm, quiet joy which does not well up out of yourself, but comes into you direct from Christ by the way of the cross—that dew which falls not on Hermon, but on Calvary—is the rarest and most roseate dew that ever charms us this side of the glory land. God give you all to know, to the full extent, the sweet bitterness—the bitter sweetness—that comes of a sight of Christ crucified, for His dear name’s sake! Amen.

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Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at [www.spurgeongems.org](http://www.spurgeongems.org).